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INFO RUEHXK/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/WHITE HOUSE NSC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L JERUSALEM 000648

SIPDIS

NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE AND IPA. NSC FOR SHAPIRO/KUMAR. JOINT STAFF FOR LTGEN SELVA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/10/2019

TAGS: [PHUM](#) [ASEC](#) [PBTS](#) [KWBG](#) [KPAO](#) [PTER](#) [IS](#)

SUBJECT: OVER A DOZEN PALESTINIANS WOUNDED IN CLASH WITH WEST BANK SETTLERS

REF: JERUSALEM 615

Classified By: Deputy Principal Officer Greg Marchese, per reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. Bat Ayin settlers and IDF soldiers on April 8 wounded over a dozen Palestinians, one of them critically, less than a week after the April 2 murder of a young Bat Ayin settler. Palestinian media put the number of injured Palestinians as high as 40, while Israeli press reported 17 injuries, including one settler. The settler leading the Bat Ayin group claimed the Palestinians provoked the incident by throwing stones, while Palestinian media reported that the settlers attacked the West Bank village of Khirbat Safa in retaliation for the April 2 attack, setting fire to multiple homes and cars. End summary.

Settler Leader Describes Clash

¶2. (C) Gush Etzion Regional Council Chairman Shaul Goldstein told Poloff on April 10 that he led a group of Bat Ayin settlers to "Mukhtar's Ridge," near the village of Khirbat Safa, for the "blessing of the sun," which is commemorated every 28 years during the Jewish Passover holiday. Goldstein said the IDF had approved the procession, which intended to continue to Kfar Etzion settlement, the burial site of Shlomo Nativ, the 13-year-old settler from Bat Ayin who was murdered by an ax-wielding attacker on April 2 (reftel). According to Goldstein, the Palestinians from Khirbat Safa were "incited" by their imam against the settlers' presence on the outskirts of their village, and began throwing stones. The settlers defended themselves by throwing stones back at the Palestinians, Goldstein said.

¶3. (C) Goldstein said IDF soldiers quickly came to the assistance of the settlers, using tear gas against the Palestinian "attackers," but stone-throwing continued for another fifteen minutes, until IDF reinforcements arrived with permission to use live ammunition. One settler lightly injured by a stone was treated in nearby Efrat settlement. Goldstein emphasized that "no settler came within 300 meters of Khirbat Safa village" or did any damage to property there, contrary to media reports that Bat Ayin settlers attacked in retaliation for the April 2 murder. Goldstein expressed anger that the Israeli media had "taken advantage" of the opportunity for a dramatic story and printed "lies," saying he had already complained to press contacts. He said the settlers had video footage of the incident proving their side of the story, which he promised to share with Poloff after the week-long Jewish Passover holiday.

Palestinian Media Reports Different Story

¶4. (SBU) Palestinian media reported on April 9 that Bat

Ayin settlers attacked Khirbat Safa village "with full IDF protection," lightly to moderately injuring as many as 40 Palestinians in retaliation for the April 2 attack. One Palestinian teenager was critically injured by IDF fire. Press reported that the settlers also burned Palestinian homes and vehicles in Khirbat Safa. (Note: Israeli media reported that sixteen Palestinians and one Israeli settler were wounded. End note.)

WALLES